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**Backstage:  
Inside the Genesis and Execution of “About A Band”**

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**Backstage:  
Inside the Genesis and Execution of “About A Band”**

**by**

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**Report**

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## **Abstract**

### **Backstage:**

#### **Inside the Genesis and Execution of “About A Band”**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

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“Backstage: Inside the Genesis and Execution of “About A Band”” details the shaping of the narrative in the second draft of the feature length screenplay “About A Band” and examines how the process was informed by influences both academic and cinematic.

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## Chapter One: New Beginnings

In May of 2015, I met with my thesis committee to discuss the first draft of a feature length screenplay called *About A Band*. Much of the discussion during that initial meeting was in response to a companion document I had sent them prior outlining my own view on the material and where I wanted to try to take it in the second draft. All parties involved seem to agree on what the main problem with the first draft was: it lacked a spine.

It was seemingly a simple problem, but simple problems often require intricate solutions. And that one big problem was the source of many of the script's other symptoms. The draft felt loose; it lacked a tight structure. There were seeds of compelling thematic questions, but they weren't sprouting. There wasn't narrative drive; as my reader noted, it was unclear what the "finish line" was going to be for the characters. The characters weren't working towards a specific concrete goal.

Yet, while the script was not yet a gestalt cohesive whole – it didn't exceed the sum of its parts - there were some good parts in there. There were scenes that felt right – or at least, they felt like they came from a different, better movie. There were *moments* that worked. And trying to find the movie those moments belonged in was going to be a big part of writing the second draft. There was enough material in the script that I liked to warrant trying to make it better, and besides - I'd selected this material for my thesis precisely *because* it was in such dire need of a rewrite. I left that initial thesis meeting

knowing what was working, and knowing what the problems with the material were.

Now, I just needed to fix them.

## Chapter Two: The Approach

My thinking approaching the initial rewrite was to keep what was working and to cut what wasn't. If I could then fill in the blanks with good (or at least better) material, then the second draft would be an improvement over the first. Especially if I could fix the big problem and give the script the guiding spine it lacked.

I knew also that I had to stay true to what attracted me to the material in the first place; I was attracted to the idea of a story that touches that moment we've all had in our (usually early) twenties when you're young and broke and struggling and uncertain. And I wanted to examine the creativity that that kind of hunger instills. There's a romance to that period in someone's life, but what no one really talks about is how those romantic notions are always in hindsight. It's never fun or romantic *while* you're striving and struggling; it only seems that way in retrospect. And that's what the story needed to explore.

The first problem I wanted to solve was structural. The story was starting in the wrong place in the draft I had. In that draft, there were pages and pages of material in Act I that felt like fluff and filler before the story reached the point at which the two lead characters (Shannon and Kris) first encountered each other – the “meet cute” moment that sparked the story and set it in motion. That was where the story really started. I wanted to cut all the filler material and just start the story there, but the challenge that presented was that I would lose the audience's awareness of the protagonist's backstory.

Because this was the story of a woman going from giving up on music to getting back in touch with her passion for it (via the struggles of a band through the highs and lows of life at volume ten), I thought the audience needed to see the protagonist's musical endeavors *not* working out in Act I in order for the story to be satisfying when in Act III her musical endeavors *do* work out. If we didn't see her as bitter towards music at the beginning, then we wouldn't appreciate the significance of her contentment regarding her musical pursuits at the end.

After I cut the filler material prior to the "meet cute" moment, the solution to the problem of explaining her backstory seemed obvious - the backstory could be parsed out to the audience in dialogue. If we didn't actually see what happened to her to make her give up on music, the mystery surrounding that would keep the audience watching – or, at least, the reader reading. It seemed like the right way to go, especially considering that one of the films I had studied as a structural paradigm – John Carney's *Once* – used the same structure, opening on a meet cute and then revealing backstory via dialogue. But I was instinctively resistant to doing it that way because probably the most basic principle of cinematic storytelling is "show, don't tell." Would this new opening work?



### **Chapter Three: Rewriting the Opening**

That approach to the opening (see Appendix A) actually wasn't quite right – at least not for the second draft. I was able to rewrite the meet cute moment with what I thought was much stronger more visual scene description, and the meet cute moment (excerpted from Appendix A below) worked on its own terms, setting up a spark between the two leads in a cinematic way:

Their speed builds. The group of ONLOOKERS grows. They listen, genuinely taken with the performance, eyes flicking between Shannon and Kris - who will win?

If there's a rock counterpart to the banjo duet in Deliverance, this is it.

Kris and Shannon finish the song, exerted. Pleased.

They return their instruments to their stands. The crowd fizzles. Show's over.

Curious, Shannon walks to the aisle's end, pauses - gathering herself with a sharp intake of breath - and rounds

it, where - for the first time - she meets eyes with Kris...

...And they spark. He smiles. She smiles. Infectious.

Shannon, meet Kris. The fuse is lit. (Appendix A)

The approach seen in Appendix A was definitely a stronger way to start the story, and it grabbed the reader from the very beginning in a way that the first ten pages of the first draft had not - but it still wasn't quite the right approach for this narrative; it was material that belonged in the second draft, just not at the beginning of the story.

The right approach to rewriting the opening ended up being a compromise between the first draft's slogging start and the *in media res* kinesis of Appendix A. The problem with the first draft's approach - starting the story in Los Angeles and showing the event that triggers Shannon's departure from the music world before moving the action to Seattle - was that it gave the audience too much information; frankly, it was boring. While the Appendix A approach injected mystery into the first act and gave the audience dangling questions to keep them invested in the narrative, it failed to adequately set up the protagonist's character - and it failed to show us in as clear a manner as possible what about her needed to change over the course of the story. The solution lay in-between the two approaches: starting the story in the aftermath of the event that prompts her to leave Los Angeles for Seattle. If we didn't actually see the event, we'd

still experience the mystery of what it was. But if we were introduced to her immediately after it happened, we'd still get a feel for the emotions behind her decision to leave.

One thing I learned early on in a course at UT Austin came from Professor Cindy McCreery, who placed extreme importance on where a story starts. She framed this question as “why now?” or “why start the story here?” In *About A Band*, the reason the story starts where it does in the second draft (with Shannon having given up on her musical endeavours) in terms of character is that the protagonist is at a crossroads – which is always good fodder for drama. It's a way to set up the character as someone doesn't know if she can keep doing what she's been doing. And starting the story just as she is thrown into the apprehension and uncertainty that accompanies any decision to leave one's old life behind sets up what the story is really about: a woman getting back in touch with her love for what she does – a woman testing the Sisyphean notion that “the struggle itself towards the heights is enough.”

Starting the story at that point was also interesting in terms of classic narrative construction. Shannon moving to Seattle is a pretty cut-and-dry example of a protagonist “entering a new world” which - Joseph Campbell's pedantic nonsense aside – is helpful in that it enables the audience to more quickly identify with the protagonist. Shannon is an outsider to the prototypical 1988 Seattle music scene that comprises the world of the story, and so, ostensibly, is the audience. As the audience's surrogate, Shannon becomes our point of entry into the foreign world of the script.

As soon as I had the right opening for the draft, it was easy enough to join that with the Appendix A material. The challenge thereafter was how I would approach the

remainder of Act I in order to address the notes I'd received during my initial thesis meeting.

## Chapter Four: Act I Continued

One of the scenes in the first draft that had really seemed to stick out to everyone was a scene shortly after the two leads meet, in which they're both getting to know each other by discussing their sonic influences. The business of that scene involved Shannon examining Kris' record collection for the first time and making judgments about him based on its contents. The playful flirtatiousness of the characters (particularly moments in which Shannon teases Kris about questionable items in the collection) was working; it endeared us to their chemistry. The scene's dialogue felt natural, and played into necessary world-building; the specificity of the scene's references functioned to remind us of the period (1988) while also telling us about the musical tastes of the characters. But more importantly, the scene was a natural way to coax out critical exposition: the scene was an opportunity for Shannon to believably vocalize her "want" (to make a record) – something the audience needed to know for the story to work. It was an important "plant" in the script for a big payoff in Act III, and it felt like it belonged in the final movie. The only problem? It was in Act II in the first draft, and I wanted to move it into Act I.

I knew I wanted to get from the Appendix A meet cute scene to the above-mentioned record collection scene as soon as possible, but it would be odd to cut directly from the former to the latter; we wouldn't buy that a girl in her twenties would immediately go straight to the apartment of some guy she'd just met – or at least, not *this* girl in her twenties. I needed to add a scene in-between in which we see them getting to

know each other. But I didn't want to set it at a diner or a bar or in any static location because I wanted to keep the story moving – to continue the kinetic momentum established in their meet cute. I decided to keep the story moving in a literal sense by setting the scene in a moving monorail car – which is germane to the characters' socioeconomic status and has the added benefit of reminding us that we're in Seattle. It just felt more visual. I guess it's an easy tip, but setting any scene in a moving location can make it feel more interesting and textured than setting it somewhere static or fixed. The next challenge was *how* the characters would get to know each other organically in the scene.

## Chapter Five: The Problem of Exposition

Getting-to-know-you scenes often kill narrative momentum. True-to-life dialogue between characters in which they ask each other where they're from, what they do, etc. is painfully boring on-screen. I didn't want to do that, so I didn't try. It seemed natural for these characters to get to know each other *not* via that kind of stale dialogue, but via music. After all, this was going to be a film about music – and about finding their place within it together. I decided to inject some conflict into the scene and make it an argument between them – albeit a friendly argument – about favorite bands, first musical experiences, musical influences, or the like. I wanted to capture the nuanced banter of dedicated music fans – and to give the audience a taste of what these kinds of conversations may have been at the time. *Almost Famous*' scenes between Lester Bangs and the protagonist were a good touchstone. The dialogue needed to move along (just as the monorail car does). It needed to have a fast rhythm - the kind of fast-paced dialogue I'd heard while re-watching the film *His Girl Friday* in my advisor Charles Ramírez Berg's History of Film course my first semester in the MFA program. I wanted a verbal ping-pong between the two leads – wherein they're sizing each other up and learning about each other musically – because to these people, the musical *is* personal. So I executed the scene that way, and it's one of the better scenes that was a product of this rewrite. And it worked; it functioned as a means of bridging the Appendix A meet cute to the record collection scene in Kris' apartment without coming off stale or cheap.

## Chapter Six: The Opportunity

When discussing narrative structure in film courses, we talk a lot about “the opportunity” that emerges in the first act – a moment in which the protagonist is presented with the chance to embark on the adventure that will comprise Act II. In executing that moment in this script, I looked a lot at – believe it or not – heist films. We’re used to the trope of the criminal who’s gotten out of the game and doesn’t do heists anymore – until he gets roped into “one more job.” I thought about that kind of heist film first act structure – the reticent protagonist, the buddy encouraging them to take one last assignment – and I wondered how I could apply that to my first act. At some point, the opportunity had to emerge – “let’s form a band.” Kris had to ask Shannon to give music one more shot, to take part in one last hurrah.

That was what had to happen in the scene, but the problem wasn’t the “what” – it was the “why.” In the first draft, it was unclear what exactly these two characters were trying to accomplish by forming a band. “Let’s form a band and try to make it as musicians” isn’t a concrete or specific goal, and it doesn’t promise a climax. It’s vague and undefined, and solving that problem was important in the second draft. In *School of Rock*, the audience knows the climax is going to be the battle of the bands by the end of Act I. This script didn’t have that kind of promise of a climax from the outset, and that was why it lacked a spine. As noted by my reader earlier, there wasn’t a clear finish line for the characters.



To find the solution, I studied films and scripts in the genre. *School of Rock*, *The Commitments*, *Crazy Heart*, *Walk The Line*...all these movies end with the same trope - the big show. But the first draft of this script didn't have a big show; I needed to invent one. But I didn't want to leave the intimate world of Seattle – or at least the world of the burgeoning underground grunge movement. The show needed to be big and important, but also somehow local and contained. It needed to be germane to the story. So I thought about what would make sense to the audience. What could I use that was reasonable?

The Gorge made the most sense. It's a legendary outdoor venue in Washington – a huge amphitheatre. If I could build a big show set at The Gorge into the story, I'd have the elements needed to create a satisfying climax. So I did. I made it a huge event – basically the Woodstock of the Pacific Northwest. The band's goal would be to get on the bill in order to have a shot to make a record with their hero – a prestigious record producer. It was a specific, concrete goal, it made sense in the world of the story, and it was a means of both satisfying Shannon's external goal – “make a record” and her internal goal – “get back the right reasons for playing music.” And, critically, it would give the story a spine, the characters a finish line, and the movie a set piece.

## **Chapter Seven: Highs and Lows**

The good news was I was pleased with the first act, and I had started to solve the first draft's main problem. The bad news was that there was a more practical problem – time. It had taken me a month to execute the first act right, and it was only one act. I only had a month left prior to my final deadline to execute the remaining two acts.

In the mandatory writing courses that formed part of the MFA program, this had always been a problem with my process – I had focused too much on executing the first act properly, at the expense of what was really the heart of the movie – act II. I spend too much time focusing on Act I and trying to make it perfect. This is a big problem; as my thesis reader Beau Thorne had long contended, Act II is what most people think of when they think of any given movie. And it's the hardest to write well. Looking now at the second draft, this couldn't be more obvious; most of the strong writing and the strong moments are in Act I. Acts II and III feel much weaker in comparison. In the future, this is an issue I'll need to keep in mind and work to oppose. Anyone can write a good first act; it's easy to make likable characters we want to see succeed. The hard part is throwing rocks at them – and figuring which rocks of which size to throw and when.

## **Chapter Eight: Act II**

With a month to go, I embraced the advice of my thesis committee – “Write fast, think later.” The best thesis is, in fact, a finished one. So I pulled in the moments that were working from the first draft and tried to write around them. There was a sequence (see Appendix B) in which we see the two broke musicians celebrate their early minor success – by infiltrating a complementary wine reception at an upscale hotel. It worked as a portrait of creativity born of poverty, and a scene in which the two leads race past streetlamps as they blink on one after another worked as both a romantic moment and as a not-so-subtle nod to the myth of Icarus. It was essential to the script in that it captured its thematic heart – the curious romance of striving and struggle.

There was a scene (see Appendix C) that worked in which the band returns to Shannon’s car to discover that a tire boot has been affixed to it (in retaliation, seemingly, to Shannon’s illegal parking) – and they respond by sawing it off with an angle grinder. It worked as another creative solution to a practical setback, but it also established Kris as the only real ally in Shannon’s new world – and as the only person she could rely on.

There was a scene that was important thematically and worked on a visual visceral level in which the band sets off a bunch of fireworks in a field – and is forced to run for their lives when the wind doesn’t work in their favour. That scene (see Appendix D) reinforced the idea prevalent throughout the script that your twenties are a paradoxical time in which you’re struggling more than you ever have but somehow you’re also

having the time of your life. It was one of my favorite moments in the first draft, and I knew it belonged in the script.

Pulling in these effective moments was helpful, but lent Act II something of a Frankenstein-esque feel; it was a hodgepodge of patched-together disparate moments that weren't quite fitting into the new spine I'd constructed, and trying to force them in was making the script less and less organic. Keeping in mind advice I'd received earlier from my thesis advisor (that it was best to keep going forward and to figure out issues like this in the next draft), I decided to use the time I had left for this draft to focus on executing a moment that had been cripplingly absent in the first draft – the climax.

## Chapter Nine: The Climax

The climax (the big show at The Gorge) was intended to be one of the biggest moments in the story, and I knew in this draft I wanted to get the feeling of it right – even if in later drafts I’d be honing the execution. It was a critical set piece, and the scene we’d be waiting the whole movie for. The moment needed to deliver audiovisually, of course, but what was critical was that it felt significant – to us and to the protagonist. It had to be powerful. But it also needed to eclipse an earlier moment in the script that was of its ilk; in Act I, there was a scene wherein Shannon attends her first Seattle show with Kris and experiences proto-grunge music for the first time (see Appendix E). Both scenes were playing with the same fundamental element – the feeling of a being at a great live show – but the climax had to be bigger and better to outdo the earlier scene. And it had to “answer it;” if the Appendix E show was the experience of being in the audience at a mind-blowing show, the climax needed to be the reactionary opposite – the experience of being on-stage at a mind-blowing show. Prior to writing the climax, I studied big musical moments in scripts like *Almost Famous*, *Walk The Line*, and *Whiplash*. And it seemed to me afterward that one of the most powerful elements in a musical film is - perhaps unexpectedly - silence. Using silence in the climax would end up being an effective way to bring us into the mindset of the protagonist – to escalate the drama of the scene.

Budget is something I’m unable to ignore – even if I’m just thinking about a script written for a class that isn’t actually intended for production. I was writing a climax set at The Gorge, a huge amphitheatre - and a setting that lends itself naturally to huge

crowds of people. I'm always wary of anything that involves children, animals, heavy visual effects, and, of course, large crowds. So I wanted to avoid shots of the crowd to write more economically, but I still needed the atmosphere of a crowd for the moment to feel right.

The solution was simple; I'd keep the crowd in darkness - unseen. The resultant scene description actually elevated the scene, and mirrored the auditory paradox described above: sometimes the most visual element in cinema is darkness. I was able to imply a crowd – to capture that atmosphere - using both audio (cheers, roars, et al.) and the cool visual of intermittent camera flashes popping and fading across the unseen audience. I ended up relatively pleased with the way the climax turned out (see Appendix F for an excerpt), but I think there's potential to go even bigger in future drafts.

## **Chapter Ten: Lingering Issues and New Problems**

Ostensibly, scripts are never finished – they’re abandoned. While the second draft is a huge improvement on the first and begins to address the big note I received from my thesis committee regarding the absence of a spine, the script as a whole doesn’t quite work as well as it needs to in its current form. I had intended to complete a page one rewrite, but the thesis-writing process revealed that that ambition – while lofty - was actually biting off more than I could chew. Executing the story the way I did in this draft has brought me one step closer to finding the right way to do it – and it’s given the narrative a natural climax that works (and is consistent with other films in the genre). But there are still lingering concerns about issues such as tension in the second act, unresolved subplots (particularly one involving Shannon’s family), and the significance – or lack thereof - of the romantic sparks between the two.

Perhaps the biggest issue with the second draft currently is the lack of a causal connection between the low point in the new draft and the start of the climax; there’s a big moment missing there, and as-is the script simply ignores the problem, cutting from one moment to the next. That’s okay in an intermediary draft, and putting that problem aside to solve later enabled me to move on to the bigger issue of getting the climax right, but it will be the first plot issue to address going forward.

In future drafts, I would develop the relationship between the two leads more substantially, consider omitting the third band member from the script altogether, and massage the way in which the songs drive the plot – and how they reflect the progression

of the relationship between the main characters. In terms of process, in the third draft I would spend less time tinkering with the first act and more time outlining the second. The script succeeds in that it has characters that we like, but still more conflict is needed to fully exploit the potential of the premise.

Going forward, there will be a lot to change and tweak in future rewrites, but with the benefit of notes from my thesis committee, I'm confident this process will be streamlined. It's possible that developing the romance between the two leads is actually the key to solving the third draft; the narrative could be reimagined as a simple story of two musicians finding each other via the process of making an album.

I look forward to finding out.



## Appendix A - The Wrong Opening

**OVER BLACK**

PITTER-PATTER. The tinny PING of RAIN on metal.

**FADE IN:**

**EXT. STOREFRONT - DAY**

The aluminum awning over a storefront is the recipient of the water's punishment on this grey, miserable afternoon.

This is the kind of downpour you only see in one city...

TITLE OVER:

*Seattle, 1988*

Through the BLUR of WATER cascading down the store's windows, we glimpse SHAPES within. FIGURES.

**INT. RECORD STORE - CONTINUOUS**

The sound of the pounding rain now replaced by faint MUZAK.

The figures are PEOPLE...REFUGEES, seeking shelter from the rain in a sea of RECORDS: LPs, EPs, 45s, cassettes, CDs.

This isn't just a RECORD STORE - it's a sanctuary.

TWENTYSOMETHINGS browse, PERUSERS flap through cardboard jackets, TEENAGE LOITERERS play with gear they can't afford...

Off the JINGLE of the front door's BELL, signalling a new arrival--

CLOSE ON: PUNK-Y LEATHER BOOTS on the linoleum floor. DRIPPING WATER quickly forms a PUDDLE around them.

REVEAL: Their wearer (mid-20s). She boasts a striking combination of electric-blue eyes and raven black hair. A PLECTRUM necklace hangs from her neck. She is magnetic...

...And she is DRENCHED. Shivering like a wet poodle, she dumps a BUSTED UMBRELLA in an umbrella bin by the entrance.

Drawing glances from some of the store's Perusers, she shrugs off the rain, frustrated, and finishing, turns to the store. Soaking in its familiar sights, her expression quickly changes - she looks home.

Meet SHANNON.

#### **INT. AISLES, RECORD STORE - MOMENTS LATER**

She strolls along, gazing at prehistoric looking walkmans, amplifiers, cabinets, heading straight for--

#### **THE BASS GUITAR SECTION**

--Where she slows. Takes her time admiring basses hanging on the shelf. She pauses at a Warwick - sleek, slender, waiting. Gazes at it, longingly. Slides her hand over its smooth wood. Her eyes catch the pricetag. She frowns...

...But she can't resist. She reaches for it.

#### **ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SHELF**

We see an empty aisle. This side of the shelf looks like Shannon's, only it has hanging GUITARS instead of basses.

As an UNSEEN FIGURE enters the aisle--

CLOSE ON: A 1/4" JACK slides into an amp.

REVEAL: We're back on Shannon's side. She's plugged in to the test amp. She experiments idly with some CHORDS. Pauses to tune. Resumes. Satisfied with its tuning, she runs a scale.

#### **ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SHELF**

The HAND of the UNSEEN FIGURE lifts a hanging guitar.

#### **BACK TO SHANNON'S SIDE**

Now warmed up, she runs a bassline - [TBD]

A few phrases in, we hear the GUITAR PART come in, joining her. Puzzled, she looks around. Realizes it's coming from--

#### **THE GUITAR AISLE**

Where we now see the previously unseen figure (late 20s) wielding the guitar. Hearing Shannon stop, he finishes playing the phrase and waits, listening, an amused grin on his face - like a child enjoying a game.

Meet KRIS.

SHANNON

Strums out The Sex Pistols' *"God Save The Queen."*

KRIS

Joins in, grinning. Knows that one too.

A couple METALHEADS (late teens) watch them play with growing fascination.

SHANNON

Breaks into a bass line from [TBD]. Waits - and then, sure enough, Kris' guitar "answers." She smiles, loving this.

More CUSTOMERS materialize from the fringe of the store - moths to the light - aware of an impending event.

Then the training wheels come off:

She tries Neil Young. Sonic Youth. The Pixies. The Cure's *"Just Like Heaven"*. He's right there with her.

FINGERS dance across frets. A PLECTRUM attacks strings. A FOOT taps the beat. A WRIST contorts for a chord.

Their speed builds. The group of ONLOOKERS grows. They listen, genuinely taken with the performance, eyes flicking between Shannon and Kris - who will win?

If there's a rock counterpart to the banjo duet in *Deliverance*, this is it.

Kris and Shannon finish the song, exerted. Pleased.

They return their instruments to their stands. The crowd fizzles. Show's over.

Curious, Shannon walks to the aisle's end, pauses - gathering herself with a sharp intake of breath - and rounds it, where - for the first time - she meets eyes with Kris...

...And they spark. He smiles. She smiles. Infectious.

Shannon, meet Kris. The fuse is lit.

Off her EYES, radiant--

**MATCH CUT TO:**

Shannon, still, staring at us, almost daring us to look away.  
Her gaze warm with excitement, her quiet confidence obvious.

WIDER

And we're no longer at the store.

**WE'RE IN--**

## **Appendix B - The Wine Reception**

KRIS

We played our first gig. We should celebrate.

SHANNON

We're shit broke. How are we supposed to celebrate?

### **EXT. DOWNTOWN SEATTLE - LATER**

A posh district downtown. Heavy rain. FIND: Shannon and Kris - clad in Goodwill's finest formal wear - which is quickly getting DRENCHED. They scurry across the street--

### **EXT. FAIRMONT OLYMPIC HOTEL COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS**

--And take shelter under a hotel's awning. Shannon dumps water from her heels. Sizes up the hotel. It makes the Crowne Plaza look like the Hanoi Hilton.

SHANNON

You really think this is going to work?

KRIS

Relax. We'll fit right in.

### **INT. FAIRMONT OLYMPIC HOTEL, LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER**

Water DRIPS on royal red carpet.

The two dripping twentysomethings saunter in. The RECEPTIONIST cocks an eyebrow. Shannon realizes she's holding her heels. Holding onto Kris for balance, she slips them on.

They step through two double doors to discover--

**INT. FAIRMONT OLYMPIC HOTEL, RECEPTION ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

--A fancy wine reception in progress. The hotel's GUESTS (40s-50s), clad in pressed suits and extravagant dresses, mingle like uppity rich folk tend to. Shannon and Kris stick out like a turd in a punchbowl.

They look to each other - mischievous energy gathering - and together they step into the fray.

They grab glasses off a table and file into a wine line, working their way towards the SERVERS.

SHANNON

Dude. They're gonna notice.

KRIS

Shh. We're fine. Just act rich. The dress code isn't that strict. Blend in.

SHANNON

*Blend in?* Kris, you look like Oddjob's in-bred brother.

Kris stifles a laugh. UPPITY HOUSEWIFE (42) turns and glares askance at them. Blushing, Shannon curtsies.

**INT. FAIRMONT OLYMPIC HOTEL, RECEPTION ROOM - LATER**

Trace amounts of wine left in their glasses, they steal into line for a different Server.

The SOURPUSS COUPLE (late 40s) in front of them converses unheard. Shannon narrates for the scowling woman.

SHANNON

"I just can't take it anymore, Roger. The washroom doesn't even have a bidet."

KRIS

"Don't worry, darling. I stole a towel - and the batteries from the remote."

They reach the front of the line. Tipsy, Shannon holds out two glasses to the Server.

SHANNON

Our friends are joining us shortly.

He just looks at her - yeah, right. She smiles and cocks her head, blushing. Gestures to the glasses.

SHANNON (CONT'D)

The red, please.

**INT. FAIRMONT OLYMPIC HOTEL, RECEPTION ROOM - LATER**

They work another line. They're buzzed now, and earning their fair share of raised eyebrows.

Shannon bites into a funky cheese and promptly spits it out into a nearby bin.

Kris makes of show of appraising his wine: he swirls the glass. Sniffs the bouquet. Then up-ends the entire glass.

Shannon pantomimes taking a heavy drag off an imaginary cigarette, then throwing the stub on the ground and grinding it out with her heel.

**OVER HER SHOULDER**

Kris sees one of the Servers discreetly talking to the Concierge, eyes dead on them. Kris grabs Shannon.

KRIS

Time to go.

He pulls her towards the door. As they pass through the crowd behind one of the Servers, Shannon palms a WINE BOTTLE from many on the table and conceals it in her purse - though the neck sticks out.

**INT. FAIRMONT OLYMPIC HOTEL, LOBBY - CONTINUOUS**

Fighting laughter, they struggle to look normal as they exit. They fail.

**EXT. FAIRMONT OLYMPIC HOTEL - MOMENTS LATER**

Kris and Shannon burst out of the revolving doors, laughing, and flee to--

**EXT. SIDEWALK, DOWNTOWN SEATTLE - CONTINUOUS**

Grey skies and mist - the aftermath of a rainstorm. The street GLISTENS with the colorful thin film interference of water and oil.

Wine bottle in hand, Kris removes a shoe and looks side to side for bystanders. Shannon, confused, can't stop laughing.

He cushions the bottom of the bottle with the heel, then WHACKS the cushioned bottle against the brick wall until the cork SHOOTs out, spraying his suit with red wine.

Shannon loses it laughing. PASSERBYS avoid them.

The STREETLIGHT in front of them BLINKS ON. They pause, taken aback.

The NEXT STREETLIGHT BLINKS ON. Kris glances at--

**A NEARBY STREET CLOCK**

Its hands read 7:00.

**KRIS**

Smiles. He DARTS forward.

Shannon watches, confused. Then she gets it:

Kris reaches the next streetlight just as it BLINKS ON, and keeps running.

Shannon's eyes LIGHT UP. She hurries to catch up.

SOAKED, inebriated, and pounding pavement, Kris and Shannon race to reach each streetlight as they blink on in sequence.

Passerbys with umbrellas veer out of their path, eyeing them suspiciously as they pass. Shannon and Kris are oblivious.

They cross the last streetlight just as it blinks on.

Shannon raises her arms in victory. Kris clicks his heels.

They stop, panting. Exhausted.

Hands on knees, they catch their breathe. Their eyes meet.

A beat. They LAUGH - *REALLY* LAUGH - forgetting everything.



Kris' expression changes as he gazes past Shannon to--

**THE STREET**

Where puddles reflect the GOLDEN LIGHT of streetlamps. It's sublime.

## Appendix C - The Tire Boot

### EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

The band hauls their gear out. Kris holds their meagre-looking take - a few crumpled BILLS and COINS.

KRIS  
Fourteen dollars.

SHANNON  
Canadian.

THOM  
It's a start...

KRIS  
We're technically professionals now. And "Flicker?" The crowd ate that up. We should lead with that on the set list for try-outs.

SHANNON  
Or close with it.

KRIS  
You don't think it's strong?

SHANNON  
I'm not saying it lacks potential. But is it *debut album* material?

KRIS  
What are you saying? You want to relegate it to our sophomore album?

SHANNON  
It's a B-side at best.

KRIS  
It's a work in progress.

They make it to Shannon's Chevy and pause, staring at it. Shannon deflates.

SHANNON  
Shit.

A TIRE BOOT is clamped to one of the wheels. Kris inspects an affixed TICKET. Sighs.

KRIS  
There's a phone number.

She stares in horror.

THOM  
How much?

KRIS  
Looks like four hundred?

Shannon puts a hand to her forehead. Closes her eyes. This isn't happening.

Kris looks off, unsure what to say. A beat. He sees something. He smirks.

KRIS (CONT'D)  
Hold on.

He starts towards a HARDWARE STORE.

**PRE-LAP: ELECTRICAL WHIRRING**

**EXT. PARKING LOT - LATER**

A small crowd of DRUNKEN ONLOOKERS surrounds the Chevy, watching in anticipation. Shannon looks terrified.

Kris stands over the tire boot, holding an ANGLE GRINDER above his head.

He returns to the tire boot and assumes position above it. The crowd eggs him on. He basks in the attention. Brings the angle grinder down, metal on metal. SPARKS FLY--

Casting an ORANGE GLOW on Shannon's face. As she watches, her terror changes into a warm, uncontrollable smile.

Kris finishes sawing. The tire boot falls apart and the crowd APPLAUDS.

Kris milks the crowd, chasing Shannon in circles while swinging the angle grinder around drunkenly in his best Leatherface impression. She runs, laughing, screaming.

Finished, he takes a theatrical bow. Returns the angle grinder to a waiting HARDWARE STORE EMPLOYEE.

## Appendix D - Fireworks

### EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Dusk. Nothing around for miles. In the GLOW of the Chevy's HEADLIGHTS, Shannon and Kris sip beers, watching--

THOM

Standing by a vicious-looking GIANT FIREWORK CONTRAPTION.

It's arranged like a reception cake: one circle of rockets at the base supports a smaller circle of rockets atop it and so on. The kind of firework you can't buy anymore - the cause of many a nightly news story about toddlers losing limbs.

Thom clutches the end of the fuse, lighter in hand.

THOM

Why do I have to do it?

Crickets. A beat.

SHANNON

You have like *twelve seconds*. Just light it and scurry back. No biggie.

THOM

*Scurry back?*

SHANNON

(pantomiming)  
Like a chipmunk.

KRIS

Relax. It's gonna be fine.

He turns back to the firework. Shannon and Kris clink beers, loving this.

Thom grasps the fuse uneasily. Flicks the lighter on, brings the flame closer, focusing--

SHANNON (O.S.)

Remember. Like a chipmunk!

He rolls his eyes. Lights the fuse. Scurries back--

--The fuse HISSES along, circling the bottom level of rockets, lighting smaller fuses as it goes--

THOM  
I thought it'd go a lot faster.

--It rounds the second level, climbs to the third--

KRIS  
Nah. They always give you lots of time to get clear.

--Sparks fly. All the smaller fuses are lit--

THOM  
Makes sense. It's a lot safer that way.

--A light BREEZE TIPS the cake. It FALLS--

--LANDS on its side, ROCKETS POINTING STRAIGHT AT THEM--

--They FREEZE. A beat. Fuses HISS.

KRIS  
Run!

Beer bottles hit dirt. They turn. Flee. SCREAMING. LAUGHING.

ROCKETS STREAK. BANG. Dazzling kaleidoscopic BLASTS of fizzy colour - inches away. Showers of sparks. Linger smoke.

MOTION SLOWS--

And here, in the dead of night in the middle of nowhere, the band is having the time of their lives.

## Appendix E - The First Seattle Show

### EXT. KRIS' APARTMENT - LATER

Kris sees Shannon off. Before she goes--

KRIS  
Meet me here. Friday. Eight  
o'clock.

She shoots him a confused look.

KRIS (CONT'D)  
It's not a date.

SHANNON  
Yuh-huh.

KRIS  
There's something you need to see.

SHANNON  
(playful)  
Yeah, I bet there is.

Back to her, he makes for the door to his apartment complex, middle finger extended over his head.

KRIS  
Eight o'clock.

Off SHANNON, bewildered but curious--

PRE-LAP: CHUGGING BASS.

### EXT. VENUE - NIGHT

Light juts out from the doorway. BASS emanates from within. Shannon and Kris approach, sharing nips from his flask.

SHANNON  
(incredulous)  
There's no line?

He shrugs.

KRIS  
Why would there be?

They approach the DOORMAN. Kris nods. He nods back. Everyone knows each other here. He pushes open the door, turns to Shannon--

KRIS (CONT'D)  
Welcome to my little corner of the world.

#### **INT. VENUE - NIGHT**

A dumpy but intimate venue. It's vibrant - electrified by the frantic energy of teeming LOCALS (20s). They huddle together - an endemic sea of flannel - clinking bottles and chatting.

Somewhere past the crowd, AMP DISTORTION cues the BAND's next song. Shannon steps on something - a disposable camera - one of many littering the floor alongside spent cigarettes.

Shannon - ever the outsider - soaks this in.

Kris finds her hand and pulls her--

#### **THROUGH THE CROWD**

Surging around them as the band - an early Green River type - breaks into a PROTO-GRUNGE SONG. The crowd ERUPTS into an explosion of intensity.

#### **SHANNON**

Still. She absorbs the moment - taking it all in - awed by this new world. Her trance breaks as--

Kris tugs her hand. Her eyes find his.

KRIS  
(shouting)  
Come on!

He pulls her to--

#### **THE FRONT**

Where MOSHERS SLAM the floor in time with the BAND on-stage. Adrenaline undulates throughout the crowd. The music pours out from the band like a seizure of pent-up fury.



Motion SLOWS to a crawl.

Hands thrust bottles high, discharging BEER that hangs in the air - a fluid eruption worming its way upwards.

The BASS DRUM BATTER arcs towards the drum head. ON IMPACT, the head vibrates, oscillations swelling and bouncing about its circular surface like a trampoline. Air BLASTS OUT, punching into the smoke hovering about the room.

Mid-jump, a Mosher's hair hangs above his head.

The GUITARIST's plectrum bounces off a string, its momentum reversed back on itself as forces react.

SHANNON - the one still figure suspended amidst the chaos - is absolutely fuckstruck.

## Appendix F - The Gorge Climax

### INT. BACKSTAGE, THE GORGE - MOMENTS LATER

The CROWD NOISE intensifies as the Stagehand leads them through the darkness by flashlight.

Shannon and Kris share a look. It's really happening.

SOMEWHERE ON-STAGE

A voice BOOMS in the darkness.

VOICE (O.S.)  
From Seattle, Washington: The  
Kinetics.

Applause. Deafening cheers.

### INT./EXT. STAGE, THE GORGE - CONTINUOUS

The Band takes to the dark stage. We stay on Shannon, resolute, as--

Sound all but DISAPPEARS. We hear just her heart POUNDING and a high-pitched tinnitus-like RINGING. Tunnel vision.

Shannon straps on her bass. Plugs in. Mind racing.

On autopilot now, she finds her mark by her pedalboard. Adjusts her mic.

She strums a chord, testing. We're live.

Her mouth hovers over the mic. She trembles, trepidatious. Everything around her vanishes.

She glances at THE SETLIST taped to the stage.

She looks up--

Cameras FLASHES POP and FADE, dancing across the darkened unseen audience.

Then it happens, all at once:

HOUSE LIGHTS FLAIR UP--

SOUND POURS IN--

SHE LOOKS TO KRIS--

HE GIVES HER A NOD--

FINGERS MEET STRINGS--

--And the Band LAUNCHES STRAIGHT into their opening song -  
"Magnetic."

We don't see the crowd, but she does. She takes it in - the crowd, the blue light, Kris thirty feet away, the camera flashes, the scenic view, the atmosphere of thousands of people together in the best outdoor venue in the world.

Guitar SOARS. Bass guitar CHUGS. Shannon locks in with the drums.

Then, she gives in. Lets go. Gets caught up in the electricity of it all. Her apprehension fades, and she soaks in the pure visceral joy of playing.

She basks in it, then glances sidelong--

ACROSS THE STAGE

--Where Kris stands at his mic. He meets her gaze, ecstatic - he feels it too. We linger in this moment, staying on their chemistry, living in this night, until we--

**CUT TO:**

## Appendix G - Record Collection Scene (Excerpt)

### INT. KRIS' APARTMENT - DAY

Sparsely furnished. A definite twentysomething pad.

Kris pours whiskey into two repurposed mason jars.

Standing at a bookcase full of records, Shannon runs a finger along the spines of frayed cardboard jackets, searching. She pauses at one. Yanks it. Examines the sleeve - [sleeve TBD]. Record in hand, she turns to Kris. Cocks an accusing eyebrow.

KRIS  
It was a phase.

She shoots him a knowing smirk. He hands her her "glass."

SHANNON  
Yuh-huh.

She replaces it. Resumes perusing.

SHANNON (CONT'D)  
Aw, you're still on The Ramones?  
That's cute.

She continues perusing.

SHANNON (CONT'D)  
The Sonics...Carly Simon?

She turns and shoots him a look. He starts to speak, but she holds up a hand to stop him.

SHANNON (CONT'D)  
I don't even want to know.

He smiles, sheepish - caught. She turns back to the records.

Scanning the records, her eyes light up.

SHANNON (CONT'D)  
Oooh!

She yanks one. Hugs it to her chest, turns to Kris. Thrusts the sleeve out for him to see. It's The Kingsmen's *Louie Louie*.

SHANNON (CONT'D)

This is definitely happening.

She slides the vinyl out of the jacket, like a kid opening a Christmas present. He watches her, taken with her excitement.

She puts the vinyl on. Takes a seat across from Kris as the lead-in CRACKLING of the record begins.

## **Appendix H: Actual notes from the initial thesis meeting**

- *The Commitments / Waiting for Guffman* model: someone is supposed to show up in the third act and doesn't.
- Shannon's conception of success isn't clear: what is a win versus what is a loss? Should be clear. The record could be a win for Shannon.
- The duet in the music store is what gets her back into it. But if it's what she loves, then it doesn't matter. If later it becomes that the promoter's going to show up...
- She thinks of Roxy as the sibling that never "got it", but that's inconsistent. Roxy is actually understanding. She never seems as judgmental as Roxy makes her out to be.
- Is this movie about music? The road? Coming of age? Romance?

- The birth of grunge is passed over. If it's about grunge, walk us through that. How do previous movements lead to grunge?
- Whatever is pulled off the shelf has to feed into how grunge started.
- Why do musicians do this? Love for the road?
- The notion of "making it" runs contrary to the DIY ethos of punk. No one was thinking about making it.
- If the people in Seattle are just there for the joy of it, that works for you if Kris is asking Shannon why she's so concerned with making it.
- It'd be a foul odor in Seattle to ask "are we making it?"
- What is making it? The tension about her answer versus his

answer. What is the return on creativity?

- People in Seattle didn't care about making it. But then they did make it. Seeing success. How to deal with it. That's universal to all art.
- It doesn't matter what they pull off the shelf - it matters how that's going to be filtered by them into the music they're going to make. If they pull ABBA, they need to talk about like "Their harmonies were so good...track 3." That informs their music. Even Sonic Youth has a song about The Carpenters. Just reinventing, making new music, finding a new sound.
- *Glen Miller Story* (film). It gets the audience to listen to the music with the protagonist. Includes audience on the quest.
  - He's putting together an orchestra. He has this sound he's trying to achieve. It's in his head - a different sound. So maybe Shannon and Kris are going after



something they're hearing in their heads. Heading towards something and they don't know what it is. But it's not *this*.

- There's a scene where Kris clearly articulates that punk is this, but grunge is this other thing. We get what the genre is way too early. It wastes the idea of the search. Steps on it. They shouldn't have the genre down; they should be searching for their sound.

- o But to embrace the search is to include the audience. That's the grail - that's what they're struggling to find that they can't quite reach.

- Maybe you add a scene where Thom says "it's good enough" but Shannon says "it's not there yet." It's on the tip of their tongues. They can't quite articulate it. That sense of "Why isn't this right?"

- It's more rewarding to see an artist say "I'm not achieving the art" - "It's just beyond my reach."
- Shannon is an outsider. "You guys are playing something different." Kris says "everyone plays it the L.A. way. We play it this way." Then she starts to get it too.
- Why do this? Maybe Kris feels fulfilled when he does it, and he'll be doing it anyway. That idea of "Why was I ever doing it?" Going to do it no matter what.
- Why are people doing anything? Some are because they love it.
- We know muzak isn't going to work out. It's good that you get rid of that early.
- *Get On Up.*

- o He hears stuff. Scene with the band, they tell him they can't play what he wants to hear. Maybe what they're playing isn't what they want to hear.
- Out of left field idea: What if she comes in having been steeped in L.A. and comes across the Seattle sound, then she rings an 80s dialectic to it. "If we just tried a little harder, we could find an audience." She's trying to walk the line between commerce and art. Then you have Shannon representing commerce, and Kris representing art. Give a good argument to each side.
  - o Shannon wants to put flyers up, Kris figures the audience will find them if they just play well enough.
    - Shannon wants a little concession, but Kris figures the second they start to make concessions, they start to lose it.
- Shannon should be into it for the wrong reasons initially, but she should learn the right reasons by the end. Transformation is letting go of her previous conception

of success.

- In this draft, they're starting on too close to the same page. They wouldn't break up. But if Shannon is results-focused and Kris is more of a purist, it might work better. Kris articulates that it's not about money or billboard or any of this stuff.
- *Inside Llewyn Davis.*
- Capture Seattle. Backwater. Hendrix was from there. But at this time, it's the furthest thing from the industry. Liverpool in '61.
- Audition sequence: if the dummies are all good, then they can argue about why one should get in versus the other. Here's what this drummer is missing - specific musical problems. Fitting into the sound they're trying to find.

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